

PHP and MySQL: A great combination for small businesses and non-profit organizations

By: Milder H. Lisondra

Many small companies want what larger, more established organizations in their industry have. From long-term contracts to automated systems. I am going to touch upon the latter topic. Specifically, the issue of a small business website, which is an integral part of its overall business processes. Although almost all small businesses have a website, most of them have limited their online presence to rudimentary information such as company history, contact information, and a few select images. All of these are important, but so much more is possible with a little research and the right Web Application Engineer. Many small business owners I have met over the years express the need for functions such as a search engine, reporting, product galleries, and backend functions (i.e. receiving an email message from the website that tells you the most viewed product, allowing appropriate change in inventory or even your marketing strategy). Things that their larger counterparts have, but they feel are out of their reach. Nothing could be farther from the truth! These same business owners need only contact the company hosting their website and ask what features are included in their service. Almost certainly it will include PHP and MySQL. This is especially true for websites hosted on non-windows servers (i.e. Linux, FreeBSD, and Mac OS X).

PHP (www.php.net) is a server-side scripting language that can talk to MySQL (a database; www.mysql.com) allowing dynamically generated information to be displayed on the website, just like large companies do. Even if PHP and/or MySQL are not included in the hosting service they can be added for a nominal fee. Although this fee will need to be assessed by each organization considering its use, the return on investment is well worth it.

Save Time and Money

Time is Money!! Yes, it's an old adage for business owners, but for the most part it's true. Actually, it is attuned to the fact that many small business owners constantly spend time performing tasks which do not necessarily create money, but do take significant time. A very good example involves mailing out brochures of product lines to potential customers. This could easily be handled by the website by way of detailed production descriptions and high-resolution images of the products. This actually can save money by reducing the amount of brochures printed and mailed. Even if someone wanted a hardcopy of your brochure they can simply contact your company directly and request one. Obviously, a secure (password protected) administration application (which can be integrated into the actual website the public visits) will be created to allow uploading of product pictures and information. Because the information can be modified at any time and from anywhere, there is the added benefit that website visitors always have access to accurate information.

Rewards for Non-profit organizations

One of the best candidates that can benefit from a website developed with PHP and MySQL are non-profit organizations such as church groups, car clubs, and similar communities created for a common goal. Although these groups do not have a bottom line like their for-profit brethren, they do share the need for items such as event schedules, membership information, and general information that they may want to share with the public. I personally have had the opportunity to participate in fulfilling the website needs of a non-profit organization. Club Ellucero, www.estrellaclub.com, has a website that runs on PHP and uses MySQL as a database. Functions available to the administrators include an event schedule, board of directors roster, and document storage.

Because of limited funds for operating expenses, non-profit organizations can truly benefit from hosting companies which include PHP and MySQL in its service offerings.

Web Application Engineer Wanted

A website with a foundation made up of PHP and MySQL will need to be created and implemented with the aid of an experienced Web Application Engineer. Even if a member of the non-profit or an associate of the business itself designs the overall look of the website, including graphics and layout, a programmer is still required to write the PHP and MySQL code to add all the functions required by the organization. Although a for-profit organization will incur cost for the engineer, it is not unheard of for non-profit organizations to find professional programmers willing to donate their skills pro-bono.

About the Author

Milder specializes in producing reliable web applications for small and medium sized businesses, including data integrators, multimedia firms and real estate professionals. With over 5 years of real-world experience, Milder is able to offer solutions that address an organization's core needs and is aligned with its overall business process. In addition to Web Development expertise, Milder spent a significant amount of his early professional career providing support to end users in the form of Bench Technician, Configuration Specialist, and Technical Support.

Although the basis of his application development knowledge stems from the use of Microsoft products (ASP, SQL SERVER, .NET), Milder is also well versed in Open Source technology, specifically PHP and MySQL. Because many small businesses use shared hosting services for their websites (which many times includes PHP and MySQL), Milder has been able to provide web based solutions at budgets a small operation can be comfortable with.

Prior to becoming an Independent Consultant, Milder was employed as a Web Developer by the largest Multiple Listing Service in Northern California. Milder lives in the Central Valley of California with his wife and two daughters.

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